

GAINS IN ESP STUDIES BY SOVIET DOUBTED

American Specialists See No
Evidence of Any Development
Not Already Known in U.S.

By HOYCE RENSBERGER

Indications that the Soviet Union is doing a serious research in parapsychology have fascinated and worried some Americans for years. As a result of the image of Soviet science as a "monolithic" institution dedicated to serve the goals of the Communist Party, some people fear that the Russians see such research as leading to some effective method of "thought control" or "psychological warfare."

The Menninger Foundation has suggested that it may be a good idea for American scientists to learn all they can about parapsychology, also known as psychotronics, before the Russians get the upper hand. The foundation itself is engaged in such studies.

Despite the fears, the best indications are that although the Russians are indeed pursuing parapsychology research, much of it under military auspices, they have not discovered or developed anything that American researchers do not already know. And that is little indeed.

Some Soviet research has been published in literature available to Westerners, including such books as "Mysterious Phenomena of the Human Psyche," "Suggestion from a Distance," and "Experimental Studies in Mental Suggestion." Research on parapsychology is widely publicized in the domestic Soviet press. Researchers have participated in international conferences and contributed papers to international books.

Same Skepticism as in U. S.

From one such paper—in a report of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on the "parasciences"—it appears that parapsychologists in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe face as much skepticism in their countries as do Americans.

Zdeněk Rejčák, a Czechoslovak researcher, author of several books and in 1977 president of the International Association for Psychotronic Research, said three years ago that the goal is to develop methods so that experiments can be replicated just as is the standard in the rest of science.

R. A. McConnell, a professor of biophysics at the University of Pittsburgh and a founder of the Parapsychological Association, has attempted to survey Soviet research in the field. He has corresponded with Soviet researchers and read much of their published work. He said in an interview that he knows of no evidence that they have hit on anything American scientists do not know about.

"In fact," he said, "from some of the approaches they're taking, I don't think they have a good grasp of the essence of the phenomenon."

Interest in Electrical Emanations

He was referring to Soviet interest in electrical and radio emanations of the human body and brain. Such emanations exist but are extremely weak—an electroencephalograph picks them up—and decades of attempts by Western scientists to make sense of them have yielded nothing that appears remotely like thought transmission.

Kirlian photography, a phenomenon discovered in the Soviet Union, is among these interests. Under certain conditions, the human body and other things have a certain amount of high frequency electrical current that, like microscopic sparks, will discharge on a piece of film when it is touched. When developed, the film shows images corresponding to the shape of the finger or whatever.

It is said that faith healers generate such electricity when doing their thing and that the "life force emanations" from sick people are different from those of the healthy. The Russians have sought to adapt this to medicine through bio-energotherapy.

The Soviet interest in parapsychology is in keeping with the interests of Soviet researchers in other fields that are considered of marginal interest in the West. They are looking for their version of the abominable snowman and "lost stone age tribes."

Soviet interest in this parapsychology has been criticized and ridiculed by Chinese scientists as an example of the decay of Soviet ideological resolve. The Chinese consider such research quackery and pseudoscience. Chinese researchers, writing the journal *Scientia Sinica*, have said the Soviet belief in ESP denies the fundamental Marxist principle that consciousness is a true reflection of the objective world.